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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

19 November 1956

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 89-56

SUBJECT: Probable Consequences of Alternative US Courses of
Action with Respect to the Baghdad Pact

1. Uncertainty about the US relationship to the Baghdad Pact has figured importantly in the complex power struggle which has been going on in the Middle East over the last two years. As originator of the regional defense concept embodied in the Pact and as the supplier of military aid to all of the Middle East members of the pact group, the US has shared in the opprobrium vented against the Pact and its members by the USSR, by India and other Asian neutralists, and by Egypt and its Arab friends. At the same time, however, US reluctance to adhere to the Pact has been a major factor in the struggle between the pact members and their regional rivals. The opponents of the pact have sought to play up the disadvantages to the US of becoming overly identified with the pact group as against other countries of the area and have exploited the ambiguity of the US position to undermine the pact and its Middle East members. The latter, in turn, have repeatedly pressed the US to make a firm and open commitment to the pact. Although this pressure abated somewhat after the US decision in early 1956 to participate in the economic

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and countersubversive activities of the pact organization and to sit in as observer on the military side, the basic desire of the pact members for a firm US commitment remained unsatisfied. Strong pressure for US adherence was again applied following Egypt's nationalization of the Suez Canal at the end of July 1956 and, in the wake of the Anglo-French military intervention in Egypt, has now been renewed with special urgency by the four Middle East members of the group.

Consequences of Early US Adherence to the Baghdad Pact

2. Early US adherence to the Baghdad Pact would be generally interpreted as a dramatic demonstration of US determination to oppose the extension of Soviet power and influence in the Middle East and its willingness to take a strong stand against the efforts of Nasser and others to undermine the Western position in the area. As a result it would do much to dissipate the general impression of US weakness and indecision which, over the last two years, has done much to discourage the Baghdad Pact governments, to weaken the will of friendly or uncommitted elements in other Arab states to stand up against Egyptian or Soviet inspired anti-Western pressures, to stimulate efforts to play the US off against the USSR by Nasser and others, and to encourage greater boldness in Arab and

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Soviet efforts to undermine the Western position. The position of the Baghdad Pact governments would be considerably strengthened, all the

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[REDACTED] would view US adherence to the Baghdad Pact as a welcome sign of a hardening of the US attitude on Middle East matters and as a reassertion of US leadership in the Western cause. The possible ^{additional} adherence of one or more Arab states would probably be increased, especially if it became evident that substantial US support for the Pact was forthcoming.

3. However, early US adherence to the Baghdad Pact would also involve responsibilities and difficulties. Its lasting effectiveness as a means of rallying and providing leadership to those elements in the Middle East which for one reason or another oppose the spread of pro-Soviet and ultra-nationalist influence in the area would depend on US willingness to regard it as the first step in a more positive regional policy rather than as a one-shot gesture. The Baghdad Pact countries would also certainly regard US adherence to the pact as acknowledgement of their claims to continuing economic and military support (probably at increased levels), and if such support were not forthcoming their present misgivings about the wisdom of a pro-Pact, pro-US policy would recur. Should US adherence to the pact be followed^{up} by what the present Middle East members regarded as

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further moves toward conciliation or appeasement of Nasser and other nationalist advocates of cooperation with the Soviet Bloc, there would be a growing tendency to regard the act of adherence and any additional aid received in connection with it as empty gestures designed to propitiate the Baghdad Pact group rather than as genuine manifestations of intent.

4. US adherence to the Baghdad Pact would also lead to an intensification of the opposition to which ^{the}US, despite its efforts to remain aloof, has already incurred in the Middle East and to misgivings in various quarters. Unless the US were prepared and willing to meet these probable challenges and misgivings, a decision to join the Baghdad Pact might serve to weaken rather than to strengthen the US position in the Middle East.

5. The USSR, which almost certainly regards elimination of the Baghdad Pact as a major goal in the area, would do its best to discredit the US and weaken its influence in the Middle East. Although Nasser and like-minded leaders in such states as Syria and Jordan might still hope to induce the US to switch back to a more neutral position in Middle East affairs, they would probably revert to the attitude of hostility expressed by Nasser in his speech nationalizing the Suez Canal and would essentially

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depend on pressure tactics rather than conciliation and concessions to regain US good will and support. Both they and the USSR might seek to come up with a dramatic riposte to US accession to the Baghdad Pact, as through a leftist coup d'etat in Syria, Jordan, or Iraq, or through organized efforts at sabotage of Tapline, Aramco and other US installations. The USSR would probably counter with new warnings, possibly underlined by threatening military maneuvers and gestures against Turkey and Iran. However, we continue to believe that the USSR would wish to avoid a situation presenting a serious threat of a major military clash with the West.

6. In their efforts to counteract and discredit US adherence to the Baghdad Pact, the USSR and the Pact's regional opponents would be able to play on the strong anti-Western and nationalist sentiments which pervade the Arab-Asian world. Like the present members of the Baghdad Pact, the US would be under the special necessity of reconciling its willingness to associate with the UK in the Baghdad Pact with its disapproval of the latter's actions in the Suez crisis, and would find it considerably more difficult to do so than with continued association with the UK in NATO.

7. Early US adherence to the Baghdad Pact would also be likely to arouse disapproval on the part of India and other opponents of Western military alliances and, coming at this time, would probably arouse some

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fear, not only by these countries but by others, that the US was deliberately challenging the USSR at a particularly delicate stage in international affairs and was in effect undermining UN efforts to stabilize the situation.

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9. Timing. The likelihood of strong adverse reactions to US adherence to the Pact -- not only on the part of its avowed opponents but also by many others -- would probably be greatest at the present unsettled stage of the Suez crisis. If the US, for example, were to join

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the pact before some accommodation had been reached with respect to UN control of the canal zone and the removal of obstructions, its efforts at the UN to achieve some degree of stabilization of the Suez and Palestine situations might be seriously hampered and the risks of drastic counteraction by the USSR and its Arab collaborators increased. Since these problems are likely to remain essentially unresolved for a considerable period, however, the hazards involved in a policy of adherence to the Baghdad Pact will also tend to be continuing ones, and meanwhile the position of those urging prompt US adherence is likely to be under increasing attack. Although the governments concerned (Pakistan, Iran, and Iraq) might be reassured and mollified by private US undertakings to join the pact at the Baghdad Pact meetings in January, when the immediate crisis in the Middle East might have eased somewhat, they would almost certainly be greatly discouraged over any prolonged delay. At the same time, confidential assurances to certain pro-Western leaders, such as President Chamoun of Lebanon, of a US decision to adhere to the pact at an early date might encourage them to take a more favorable attitude toward it, and might lead one or more Arab states to join at about the same time the US decision was announced publicly.

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Consequences of Continued US Refusal to Adhere to the Baghdad Pact

10. US refusal to adhere to the Baghdad Pact would allow the US to retain a certain amount of leeway in its efforts to resolve the problems it faces in dealing with the Arab-Asian nations and with the USSR. By refusing to give the neutralists new grounds for accusing it of preoccupation with military alliances, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] and by refusing to align itself with one set of Middle East countries as against their regional rivals, the US would be in a better position to seek a comprehensive accommodation with the forces of nationalism and anti-colonialism in the Arab-Asian world. It would also avoid a further source of friction with the USSR and might thereby facilitate an easing of the present flareup between the Sino-Soviet Bloc and the West.

11. At this stage, however, these potential advantages appear highly nebulous. The prospects for an effective detente with the USSR in the Middle East and elsewhere have decreased greatly with the unfolding of the Suez crisis and might actually recede further if the USSR and its local collaborators become convinced that the US is unwilling to oppose them firmly except under extreme provocation. The establishment of an effective understanding with the neutralist and nationalist elements in the Arab-Asian world is, in turn, likely to be a long and difficult process in which a US decision on joining or not joining the Baghdad Pact would probably not have a

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decisive influence. Despite the plaudits the US has won in the Arab-Asian world for its forthright stand on Israeli, British and French military intervention in Egypt, it remains a subject of suspicion and criticism throughout the Arab-Asian area.

12. As we noted a year ago in NIE 30-4-55, continued US refusal to adhere to the pact would probably lead to its eventual demise and would be a severe blow to the Middle East governments supporting it. Already dissatisfied with what they have considered to be US unwillingness to support its friends, these governments have felt increased need for US backing as a result of Nasser's increasing influence and prestige in the Middle East, the growth of Soviet power and influence in the area, and the recent sharp decline in the ability of the UK to serve as an acceptable counterweight to these forces. While it is probable that Turkey and possibly also Pakistan could adjust to the fact of continued US refusal to adhere to the pact, the Shah of Iran would almost certainly have increased misgivings about Iran's exposed position vis-a-vis the USSR and would probably be exposed to increased domestic criticism for having unwisely departed from Iran's traditionally more neutral course. The Nuri Said regime would remain in a particularly precarious position because of its relatively isolated status in the Arab world and because of its vulnerability to criticism over its special [REDACTED] connections. Throughout the Arab world, elements disposed to look to the US for support would remain on the defensive.

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13. One alternative means of demonstrating US friendship and support for the Baghdad Pact group would be the signature of bilateral defense agreements with Iran and Iraq, the two members not already covered by regional defense alliances with the US. (Turkey is covered by its NATO membership and Pakistan by SEATO.) Such a tactic would have the advantage of shielding the US from some of the fire which has been directed against the Baghdad Pact [REDACTED]

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It would take care of Iran's strong desire for a formal defense commitment from the US [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] It might also pave the way for bilateral agreements with Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, both of which desire US support. However, it would mark the virtual abandonment of any effort at political, economic and defense cooperation on a regional basis and thus leave the Baghdad group at some disadvantage vis-a-vis the Egyptian-led bloc and the USSR.

14. For these reasons, a resort to bilateral agreements with Iran and Iraq would probably be less effective than US adherence to the Baghdad Pact as a means of reasserting US leadership in the area. The use of this approach would almost certainly be seized upon by the USSR, Egypt,

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and others as an attempt to patch up an otherwise indefensible arrangement and as a further retreat from the original concept of a comprehensive regional organization. Moreover, even if the US succeeded in retaining or perhaps adding to its Middle East allies by this means it would be confronted with increased responsibilities to them but with limited facilities for reconciling their divergent economic, military, and political interests and demands.

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